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Unamuno and James on Religious Faith

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es criticar la opinión común entre los estudiosos de Unamuno de que Miguel de Unamuno defendió una especie de argumento pragmático para la fe religiosa y que su noción de fe religiosa como "querer creer" debe identificarse con la "*will to believe*" ("voluntad de creer") de William James. Cómo mostraré en este artículo, uno de los aspectos que hace el razonamiento de Unamuno filosóficamente relevante es su habilidad de formular una defensa no pragmatista de la fe religiosa sin un compromiso previo a la verdad de ningún enunciado religioso o teológico y basada en nuestro anhelo de una existencia eterna mediante la Salvación de Dios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *fe religiosa; fundamento natural; inmortalidad; justificación pragmática; Miguel de Unamuno, pragmatismo; "querer creer"; William James*.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to argue against the received view among Unamuno scholars that Miguel de Unamuno was defending a sort of pragmatic argument for religious faith and that his notion of religious faith as "*querer creer*" ("wanting to believe") is to be identified with William James's "the will to believe". As I will show in this paper, one of the aspects that makes Unamuno's reasoning philosophically relevant is his ability to formulate a non-pragmatist defense of religious faith without a prior commitment to the truth of any religious or theological statement and grounded in our longing for an endless existence through God's Salvation.

KEYWORDS: *Immortality; Miguel de Unamuno; Pragmatic Justification; Pragmatism; Querer creer; Religious Faith; Natural Foundation; William James.*

Traditionally, scholars have assumed that Miguel de Unamuno's notion of religious faith as "*querer creer*" ("wanting to believe") is to be identified with William James's "will to believe" [for a detailed bibliographical survey, *cf.* Martínez (2006), pp. 271–292]. This alleged similarity has been taken for granted and the entire debate has focused on the biographical

task of attempting to discover whether Unamuno's "*querer creer*" was an original position which he reached alone [*cf. e.g.*, Hipólito Fernández (1961); Lago Bornstein (2009); Young (1964)] or whether it was due to the influence of William James's works — and, more concretely, to Unamuno's reading of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* [*cf. e.g.*, Franz (1985); Martínez (2007); Nubiola and Martínez 2003)]. The aim of this paper is to show that Unamuno's notion of religious faith as "*querer creer*" cannot be identified with William James's "will to believe" and neither is Unamuno's defense of religious faith construed on pragmatic grounds.

The claim that Unamuno was following James when defending his conception of religious faith is comprehensible for several reasons. In fact, some years ago I myself defended that in his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* [Unamuno (1913b)] (*The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations* [Unamuno (1913a)]), Unamuno was defending a sort of (unsuccessful) Pascalian, pragmatic argument for religious belief [*cf.* Oya (2017)]. Unamuno's emphasis on the desirability of the kind of immortality promised by the Christian God and the fact that Unamuno was defending a non-cognitivist conception of religious faith (with its consequent emphasis on its practical content), together with Unamuno's declared sympathy towards James and the very linguistic similarity between Unamuno's *"querer creer"* and James's "will to believe", facilitates this reading. It is true that we would be extremely naive if we were to think that all these similarities were products of pure chance, but in fact it is also true that we would be even more naive if, for example, we did not realize that "*querer*" ("wanting") and "*will*" are not synonyms, and that nowhere does Unamuno explicitly endorse James's views. What I mean by this is that while it seems clear that Unamuno was well aware of Jamesian pragmatism and that he was somehow sympathetic to it, this does not show that Unamuno shared James's views in any philosophically relevant sense.

In fact, I think that Unamuno's sympathy towards James can be explained not because their positions were analogous but because Unamuno thought they were addressing a similar question. The guiding line of Unamuno's philosophical thought is the question of whether, once the failure of natural theology and therefore the impossibility of forming the belief that God exists on an evidential, rational basis is accepted, our (according to Unamuno, *natural*) longing for the kind of immortality announced by Jesus Christ can provide some sort of justification for embracing religious faith. This was, at least to Unamuno's reading, the

same question faced by James in his lecture "The Will to Believe" [James (1896)]: whether the practical adequacy of religious belief – its "practical cash-value"– which, contrary to Unamuno's thought, for James does not only refer to the desirability of immortality, can justify "[...] our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced" [James (1896), p. 13]. Unamuno did not identify himself with James, but he probably found in James's writings a competent interlocutor with inclinations and a temperament similar to his own.

What these authors' really have in common is their aim of offering a nonevidential justification for religious faith — *i.e.*, a justification for embracing religious faith without a prior commitment to the truth of any religious or theological statement. The similarities, however, end here. James's defense of religious belief is construed on pragmatic grounds, as being something one willingly embraces after realizing its practical adequacy. Furthermore, although James's argument can be reconstructed as a justification for adopting a *religious attitude* – *i.e.*, the legitimacy of engaging in a religious practice, of acting *as if* the belief that God exists were true even if one is unable to believe that it is true –, James's original intention was to defend the legitimacy of *religious belief* — *i.e.*, the acceptance as a truth of the factual claim that God exists. Unamuno, on the other hand, argued for a non-cognitivist conception of religious faith, which, as I will explain, is not reduced to a mere attitude but consists of adopting a religious understanding of the world, in seeing the world as a sort of personal conscious being and in coming to feel, through the practice of charity, *as if it were* a personal relationship between ourselves and God — from conscience to conscience, so to say. Moreover, Unamuno's religious faith is not a matter of will, it is not something we voluntarily decide to embrace, but something we are all naturally (and so, inevitably) impelled to, given our human nature.

William James's argument in his lecture "The Will to Believe" stems from the claim that we cannot obtain conclusive evidence to form the belief that God exists or that He does not exist, in so far as the existence of God is a matter that goes beyond our experience. We are, then, not justified in forming the belief that God exists on an evidential basis. However, James says, religious belief can still be justified on pragmatic grounds: only if we believe that God exists, James argues, will we be able to attain those momentous consequences that follow when the religious

hypothesis is true and we believe it. Religious belief, then, is justified because of the beneficial consequences it brings with it.

But what if it turns out to be the case that God does not in fact exist? One might argue that religious belief would then have no beneficial consequences and so would not be pragmatically justified. James's answer is that even if the theistic hypothesis turned out to be false and in the end God did not exist, religious belief would still be pragmatically justified in so far as its practical value does not rely exclusively on attaining the momentous consequences that only appear when God actually exists. According to James, the mere believing that God exists has in itself practical consequences which are positive enough so as to pragmatically justify religious belief: a direct consequence of believing that God exists, which to James's thinking is independent of whether He does in fact exist or not, is that "we are better off even now" [James (1896), p. 30].

Unamuno's defence of religious faith follows a completely different line of reasoning than James's. In his major philosophical work, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos*, Unamuno argued for a natural, nonevidential foundation for religious faith; that is, according to Unamuno, religious faith is not justified because God does in fact exist or because of its practical adequacy, but because it is something we are naturally led to.

Unamuno's reasoning can be outlined as follows. Its starting point is the metaphysical claim that all singular things primarily and naturally seek an endless existence — *i.e.*, Unamuno's reasoning stems from the acceptance of a modified version of Spinoza's *conatus* [*cf.* Unamuno (1913a), pp. 9-10; Unamuno (1913b), pp. 112-113]. Unamuno refers to this most basic and natural inclination of all singular things as the "*hambre de inmortalidad*" ("hunger for immortality") [*cf. e.g.*, Unamuno (1913a), p. 42; Unamuno (1913b), p. 131]. As soon as we realize that only if God existed (and not any sort of god but the Christian God, the One who promises Resurrection) would this natural inclination be satisfied, we come to (mediately) long for the existence of such a God [*cf. e.g.*, Unamuno (1913a), p. 199: Unamuno (1913b), p. 217]. Unfortunately, despite our wanting Him to exist, Unamuno says, we are not justified on evidential, rational grounds for forming the belief that God exists or that He does not: arguments from natural theology fail in their purpose of showing the existence of God and there is no philosophical argument which succeeds in demonstrating His non-existence [*cf. e.g.*, Unamuno (1907a), p. 212; Unamuno (1907b), p. 261]. All we have is doubt.

This situation is what Unamuno called the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*", which is usually translated into English as "the tragic sense of life", although I think it would be more accurate to translate it as "the tragic feeling of life". The "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" is the struggle ("*agonía*") between our wanting an endless existence (and so, derivatively, our wanting God to exist) and our lack of evidential justification for believing that God exists (and so, our lack of evidential justification for believing that we will enjoy an endless existence). Since, according to Unamuno, our seeking an endless existence is a natural, non-intellectual inclination, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" is not a theoretical conflict but a sentimental one, something that is intimately felt — which is why he calls it "*sentimiento*" ("feeling"). On the other hand, the conflict is "*trágico*" ("tragic") because it is taken to be irresolvable: we cannot override our lack of evidential justification by voluntarily forming the belief that God exists (or that God does not exist) because our beliefs aim at truth – *i.e.*, we cannot believe that P without believing that P is true [*cf. e.g.*, Unamuno (1909), p. 269] – and neither can we suspend our judgment and resign ourselves to doubt since this would amount to silencing our most basic natural inclination [*cf. e.g.*, Unamuno (1913a), pp. 20-21 and 45-46; Unamuno (1913b), pp. 119 and 133].

The irresolubility of the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*", our incapacity to escape from the uncertainty surrounding our enjoying an endless existence, causes us a sort of anguish. Our situation is so miserable, Unamuno says, that we cannot but come to commiserate with ourselves. Moreover, once we realize the universality of this seeking an endless existence (*i.e.*, that not only us human beings but all singular things primarily and naturally seek an endless existence), we become aware that we are not alone in our miserable situation and that the whole world shares with us our tragic and anguished condition. And, Unamuno says, to claim that the whole world suffers as we do is to stop treating the world as a fact and start seeing it as a personal living being: inanimate things do not suffer, only personal conscious living beings do. This is the process by which, according to Unamuno, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" leads us to form a religious understanding of the world. Despite its length, I think reproducing the following quote will prove useful to clarify Unamuno's reasoning on this point:

> Spiritual love for oneself, the compassion one feels for oneself, may perhaps be called egotism, but nothing could be more opposed to common

> ordinary egotism. For from this love or compassion for yourself, from this intense despair, from the knowledge that just as before you were born you did not exist so after you die you will be no more, you go on to feel compassion for – that is, to love – all your fellow beings and brothers in this world of appearance, those wretched shadows who file by, going from nothingness to nothingness, mere sparks of consciousness shining for a moment in the infinite and eternal darkness. And from feeling compassion for other men, for those akin to you, beginning with those most akin to you, for those you live among, you go on to feel compassion for everyone alive, and perhaps even for that which does not live but merely exists. That distant star shining up there in the night will one day be extinguished and turn to dust and cease shining and existing. And as with the one star, so it will be with the whole of the starry sky. Poor sky! [...] If I am moved to pity and love the luckless star which will one day vanish from the sky, it is because love, compassion, makes me feel that it possesses a consciousness, more or less obscure, which causes it to suffer because it is no more than a star doomed to cease being itself one day. For all consciousness is an awareness of death and suffering. [...] And when love is so great and vital, so strong and overflowing, that it loves everything, then it personalizes everything and discovers that the total Whole, the Universe, is also a Person with a Consciousness, a Consciousness which suffers, pities and loves, and is therefore consciousness. And this Consciousness of the Universe, which love discovers by personalizing whatever it loves, is what we call God [Unamuno 1913a, pp. 152-154].[1]

This universal anguish awakens our compassion and we respond by commiserating with the whole world. And commiserating with someone presupposes a certain loving, affective relationship with whom we commiserate: we are not moved by those we do not care about at all, those towards whom we feel no affection [*cf.* Unamuno (1913a), pp. 150-151; Unamuno (1913b), p. 190]. This is why Unamuno says that our compassion towards the whole world does not only lead us to treat the world as a conscious personal living Being, but also to loving Him [*cf.* Unamuno (1913a), pp. 226-228; Unamuno (1913b), p. 232]. And this love is expressed, Unamuno says, in the practice of charity, in a loving agapistic giving of ourselves to the whole world. Charity is the expression of our love and compassion since it constitutes our *effort* to liberate ourselves and the whole world from the spiritual pain and the tragic situation in which we all live: it is through the practice of charity that we come to feel as if we were part of others, thereby somehow surpassing our own individuality without ceasing to be the individuals of "*carne y hueso*" ("flesh and bone") that we are here and now [*cf.* Unamuno (1913a), pp.

229-230; Unamuno (1913b), pp. 233-234]. And this is how this religious understanding of the world, which emerged from our "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*", leads us to the practice of charity and through it to feel *as if there were* some sort of communion between us and the world as a Conscience, as God [*cf.* Unamuno (1913a), pp. 302–308; Unamuno (1913b), pp. 272–276].

Unamuno's religious faith emerges, then, as our *reaction* to the anguish resulting from what Unamuno called the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*". In turn, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*", our longing for the existence of the Christian God despite our incapacity for believing that He exists, is a consequence of our longing for an endless existence — once we realize that only in the case that the Christian God exists would we enjoy an endless existence and we become aware of the failure of those philosophical arguments that purport to demonstrate the existence of the Christian God. Since this longing for an endless existence is, according to Unamuno, our most basic natural inclination, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" is, in the end, a consequence of our own natural human condition — this is why Unamuno calls it "*de la vida*" ("of life"). It is here that it is important to emphasize that Unamuno's reasoning does not rely, as is often read, on the psychological, contingent claim that we all desire an endless existence, but rather on the metaphysical claim that we (in fact, all singular things) naturally and primarily seek an endless existence. It is considering this longing for an endless existence as being metaphysically grounded in our human nature that allows Unamuno to conclude that religious faith, despite being a subjective reaction, is not an arbitrary one but one given by our own natural human condition.

Related to this, something which is very important to emphasize is that Unamuno's religious faith has no cognitive content at all. It does not consist in forming the belief that God exists or that the world corresponds to a description of some state of affairs: the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*", the uncertainty regarding the existence of the Christian God (and so, the uncertainty regarding the eventual satisfaction of our natural longing for an endless existence), remains "*trágico*" ("tragic"), irresolvable [*cf. e.g.*, Unamuno (1913a), p. 354; Unamuno (1913b), p. 300]. Unamuno's notion of religious faith has no factual, cognitive content because it does not rely on any given state of affairs of the world, on the fact that the world is in such a way and not in another, but rather it emerges as a natural reaction of our own, as being something idiosyncratically human, independent of the state of affairs given in the world: our conceiving the

world as a personal living being is not grounded in any trait of the world but in our own natural human condition, and so it does not constitute a description of the world.

Religious faith, therefore, arises from our longing for God to exist — and remember here that to Unamuno's thinking we long for God in so far as it is only through God's Salvation that our (alleged) natural inclination to seek an endless existence will be satisfied. But religious faith is not reduced to the mere desire for God to exist and that he Save us. As I have already said, Unamuno's religious faith consists in adopting a religious understanding of the world, in seeing the world as a sort of personal conscious being. This religious understanding is a consequence of the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*"; it is our reaction to our realizing that not only ourselves, human beings, but all singular things share with us our anguished condition in so far as they too primarily and naturally seek an endless existence. Since the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" is a direct consequence of our own natural human condition – *i.e.*, our reaction to becoming aware that only if the Christian God exists will our most basic and natural inclination be satisfied, but that unfortunately we are unable to discover whether this God exists – this religious understanding is ultimately a consequence of our own human nature too. Furthermore, this way of seeing the world as a personal living Being who suffers in the same way as we do is what moves us to the practice of charity, to a loving agapistic giving of ourselves to the whole world so as to liberate ourselves and the rest of the world from the tragic situation in which we all live. And it is through this giving ourselves to the world that we come to feel *as if we were* in some sort of affective communion with the world, *as if it were* a personal relationship between us and the world as a Conscience. Charity and its related feeling of communion with God, then, are also a consequence of our own human natural condition.

Unamuno's notion of religious faith is not, then, a mere *acting as if* God existed. It is true that Unamuno's religious faith has no cognitive or factual content — *i.e.*, a religious understanding of the world is not a description of the world. And it is also true that the practical, ethical side of Unamuno's religious faith is expressed through the practice of charity — *i.e.,* in a loving, agapistic giving to the world. But Unamuno's religious faith is not reduced to, and neither does it start with, an act. Unamuno's religious faith is, essentially, a religious understanding of the world; it primarily consists in stopping seeing the world as a fact and starting seeing it as a personal conscious Being. The important point is that we are not led to this religious worldview because of a prior commitment to act ac-

cordingly with Unamuno's charity, but it is just the opposite: charity is a consequence of conceiving the world as a personal living Being.

I hope that it is now evident that Unamuno is not claiming a pragmatic justification for religious faith. Unamuno, of course, recognizes the practical adequacy of the theistic hypothesis *if it were true* — in so far as if (the Christian) God were to exist, our most basic and natural inclination to enjoy an endless existence would be satisfied. However, it is not its practical value that justifies religious faith. Unamuno often makes claims like:[2] "[a]nd I still believe that if we all believed in our salvation from nothingness, we would all be the better for it" [Unamuno (1913a), p. 49][3] and "[...] we must believe in that other life in order to live this life and endure it and endow it with meaning and finality" [Unamuno (1913a), p. 281)].[4] However, it is not clear to what extent Unamuno's notion of religious faith has any practical value in itself. As I have already said, Unamuno's religious faith has no factual content (*i.e.*, it is a religious understanding of the world, but not a description of it) and so it does not justify our forming the belief that God exists — and therefore it does not put an end to the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*": the uncertainty regarding the satisfaction of our natural longing for an endless existence, and the anguish that accompanies that uncertainty, is our natural condition and so it will always persist. In fact, doubt (and the anguish it causes in us) is essential to religious faith: if we were to have conclusive evidence for believing either that God exists or that He does not, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" would not arise and, consequently, Unamuno's religious faith would have no place. This shows again that it is not a pragmatic calculus regarding the beneficial consequences of embracing religious faith, but rather our *natural* longing for an endless existence, and its universality among all singular things, which, according to Unamuno's schema, leads us to religious faith. So, again: Unamuno's religious faith is not a matter of will, it is not something we decide to embrace after realizing its "practical cash-value", but something we are naturally (and so, inevitably) impelled to, given our own human nature.

However, there are a few occasions when Unamuno seems to be saying that a conscious embracing of religious faith will somehow facilitate attaining an endless existence. Take the following quote from *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* — and notice again that Unamuno is using "believing" here in a non-cognitive way, as referring to his notion of religious faith and not to the acceptance, as a truth, of the factual claim that God exists:

> Who then shall be saved? And now the imagination suggests another possibility – neither more nor less rational than those possibilities interrogatively offered – and that is the thought that only those are saved who longed to be saved, that only those are made eternal who lived consumed by a terrible hunger for eternity and a need to be made eternal. Whoever longs never to die and who believes he will never die in spirit, desires it because he deserves it, or better, whoever longs for personal eternity does so because he already bears his immortality within him. Only the man who does not long, always and passionately, with a passion overwhelming all reason, for his own personal immortality does not deserve it. And there is no injustice in not giving a man something he does not know enough to desire: "Ask, and it shall be given you". Perhaps each is given what he desires. And perhaps the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which, according to the Gospel, there is no remission, is none other than that of not desiring God, that of not longing to be made eternal. [...] What cruelty is there in denying a man something he never desired nor could desire? [Unamuno (1913a), p. 271][5].

As I have already said, all of Unamuno's notion of the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" depends on the assumption that we cannot form the belief that God exists on an evidential, rational basis: a sincere man aiming at the truth in full use of his epistemic and cognitive capacities cannot come to form the belief that God exists. This seems to be a good reason for claiming that God, if He existed, would not punish our lack of belief that He exists – *i.e.*, our not accepting, as a truth, the proposition that the world is such that He exists – by depriving us of attaining an endless existence. If He were to do this, He would not be punishing us but inflicting a gratuitous, undeserved (and hence unjust) evil. But this kind of behaviour would be inconsistent with the alleged all-good and all-loving nature essential to the sort of God Unamuno is referring to — *i.e.*, the Christian God, who announces, through the figure of Jesus Christ, an agapistic giving to the world and the ultimate Resurrection of all the dead.

However, and here comes Unamuno's point in the previous quote, it does not seem to be something inconsistent with God's alleged all-good nature that He would punish us for not embracing Unamuno's notion of religious faith and engaging ourselves in a loving, agapistic giving to the world. After all, Unamuno would say, it is only a matter of hearing and acting in accordance with our own nature: a sincere man will be naturally moved to conceive the world as a personal conscious Being and to the practice of charity with no difficulties at all. Rather, what would be an insincere act and would require a conscious effort would be to deny

religious faith, in as far as this would be tantamount to trying to perform an act of self-deception by pretending to act against our own nature.

It is easy to see that this argument relies on Unamuno's main contention that religious faith is something we are naturally led to. But even conceding this, the argument still depends on other controversial assumptions such as that God would cast eternal, infinite damnations as a response to earthly, finite sins — which is a claim some Christian philosophers see as an unwarranted theological position. So, the argument is disputable for several reasons and this is why, I guess, Unamuno did not commit himself to this line of reasoning and he took care not to place too much emphasis on it (*i.e.*, Unamuno explicitly says that he only considers it as a possibility suggested by the imagination).

We have seen, then, that Unamuno is not offering a pragmatic justification for his notion of religious faith. In fact, Unamuno takes care to explicitly reject James's pragmatist account of truth. [6] Despite this, Unamuno scholars have often read some of his texts as reflecting a somewhat implicit acceptance of a pragmatist theory of truth. One of the fragments usually quoted [*cf. e.g.*, Martínez Hernández (1995), pp. 115-116] reads as follows:

> Talking to a peasant one day, I suggested to him the hypothesis that there might indeed be a God who governs heaven and earth, a Consciousness or Conscience of the Universe, but that even so it would not be sufficient reason to assume that the soul of every man was immortal in the traditional and concrete sense. And he replied: "Then, what good is God?" And that was the response, in the secret tribunal of their consciousness, of the man Kant and the man James. But in their role as professors they had to justify rationally an attitude in itself so little rational — which does not mean, of course, that such an attitude is absurd [Unamuno (1913a), p. 7]. [7]

This quote has often been read as if Unamuno were rejecting the possibility of the existence of a non-Savior God simply because that sort of God would lack any practical value. This pragmatist reading comes, I imagine, from the common failure among Unamuno scholars to realize that Unamuno's reasoning does not depend on the psychological, contingent claim that we all desire an endless existence but on the metaphysical claim that all singular things seek, as their most basic natural inclination, an endless existence. Once we become aware of Unamuno's metaphysical assumption, the answer appears to be easy. Unamuno's acceptance of a basic natural inclination commits him to also accepting that our motivation for *all* we do is somehow reduced to this natural inclination. And

this also includes the motivations that lead us to form our own beliefs. This does not, however, make Unamuno a pragmatist philosopher in any relevant sense of the term. What Unamuno is defending here is the claim that our processes of belief-formation are *motivated* by pragmatic, non-epistemic reasons. But this does not imply that the beliefs we form are *justified* by pragmatic, non-epistemic reasons. That this was Unamuno's opinion seems to be clear if we consider what he wrote in the second chapter of his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*:

> Men have long debated and long will continue to debate – the world having been given over to their debates – concerning the origin of knowledge. But, leaving aside for the moment the question of what may constitute quintessential knowledge, it is certainly clear that in the apparential order of things, in the life of beings endowed with a certain more or less cloudy faculty of knowing and perceiving, or who at any rate appear to act as if they were so endowed, knowledge is exhibited to us as bound up with the necessity of living and of procuring the wherewithal to maintain life. It is consequent to that very essence of being, which according to Spinoza consists in striving to persevere indefinitely in its own being. Speaking in terms in which concreteness borders on vulgarity, we might say that the brain, in so far as its function is concerned, is in dependence of the stomach. [...] Such then is what we may call the historical origin of knowledge, whatever may be its origin in other regards. Beings apparently endowed with perception perceive in order to live, and only to the degree they need to perceive in order to live. […] [T]he primordial fact is that curiosity sprang from the need to know in order to live, and this is the dead weight and gross matter which all knowledge and science carries in its womb. Aspiring as they do to knowledge for the sake of knowledge and truth for the sake of truth, science and knowledge are forced by the needs of life to place themselves at the service of these needs. And men, believing they seek the truth for its own sake, in fact seek life in the truth. The variety of knowledge and science depends upon the variety of human needs, and men of science usually work, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, in the service of those in power, or in the service of a nation requiring from them confirmation of its drives. [...] Knowledge remains at the service of the need to go on living, primarily at the service of personal survival. And this need and this instinct have created in man the organs of knowledge and given them the range they have. Man sees, hears, touches, tastes and smells whatever he must see, hear, touch, taste, and smell in order to go on living [Unamuno (1913a), pp. 26–28][8].

Since all our motivations are reduced to our seeking an endless existence, and since a non-Savior God would not help us to attain that endless exist-

ence, we are simply not *motivated* to try to discover whether this kind of non-Savior God exists or not. But again, that we do not care about this does not mean that we are justified in believing that such a God does not exist.

The above is related to Unamuno's reasoning for claiming that we are not justified, on an evidential basis, to form the belief that God exists. However, to read Unamuno as if he were simply claiming that one should reject arguments from natural theology because they refer to a non-Savior God is nothing more than a caricature of what Unamuno says and a failure to capture the seriousness of his philosophical and theological insights. Unamuno's denial of natural theology is not that simple. Arguments from natural theology, Unamuno says, are construed as abductive inferences that aim to justify God's existence as being the best explanation for some worldly given fact. However, the hypothesis that God exists has no explanatory power:

> For to say that the world is the way it is and not otherwise because God made it so, while at the same time we admit that we do not know why He made it so, is the same as saying nothing. And if we knew the reason why God made it as it is, then God is superfluous and the reason is sufficient in itself. [Unamuno (1913a), p. 178].[9]

In fact, in claiming that the hypothesis that God exists has some sort of explanatory power regarding some given worldly event, we get tangled up in an erroneous theological conception that fails to capture the significance of religious faith by making God something akin to a non-observable scientific theoretical entity. But it seems clear that for the common Christian man God is, of course, something quite different from an electron. God answers the "*¿para qué?*" ("wherefore?") of the world, but not its "*¿por qué?*" ("why?"): God, through His Salvation, would give an ultimate meaning and purpose to the world, but by postulating the existence of God we are not given any explanation as to why the world is such and such and not otherwise [*cf.* Unamuno (1913a), pp. 168-171; Unamuno (1913b), pp. 200-201].

Unamuno's conception of God, on the other hand, aims to preserve the significance of religious faith by allowing our (alleged) longing for God, our waiting for God's Salvation through Resurrection, even when we lack evidence to believe that such Salvation might actually occur. It is in this sense that Unamuno took his notion of religious faith to be an answer to the "*¿para qué?*": an answer because it is the kind of God involved in Unamuno's religious faith, the Christian God of the Resur-

rection, who would answer that question, and not because Unamuno's religious faith provides an answer to whether such God exists or not.

Moreover, as I have already said, Unamuno's religious faith is construed upon our (alleged) longing for God's existence and that He Save us. And this longing of ours is something *affective,* requiring us to conceive God as a personal living Being (although it is still impossible for us to conceive Him as actually existing). This is how – and this is one of the most relevant and original aspects of Unamuno's reasoning – Unamuno is able to formulate a non-cognitivist conception of religious faith that aims to preserve the affective relation between man and God without having to commit himself to the factual claim that God exists.

Unamuno's rejection of the arguments from natural theology relies on the notion of God assumed in these arguments failing to capture the significance of religious faith, because it does not succeed in preserving this affective relation: a first cause of the world is not the Christian God to whom we pray and in whom we wait. This is what Unamuno means when he contrasts the God of his faith, the "*Dios-Biótico*" ("Biotic-God"), the live God "[…] to whom man truly prays and whom man truly desires" [Unamuno (1913a), p. 195],[10] with the scholastic God of natural theology, the "*Dios-Idea*" ("God-Idea"), whom is neither loved nor desired, but simply postulated as a cause of the world (as an answer to the "*¿por qué?*"). In short: Unamuno is not rejecting the success of arguments from natural theology on pragmatic grounds, just because the kind of God they aim to demonstrate does not help us to satisfy our natural longing for an endless existence. Rather, he rejects these arguments because the kind of God referred to in them fails to preserve the affective significance of religious faith, and this is so because the kind of God these arguments assume is a non-Savior God.

So far I have argued that Unamuno's defense of religious faith is not construed on pragmatic grounds. However, as I pointed out at the beginning of this paper, Unamuno scholars have not only referred to his reading of *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, but they have also claimed that Unamuno's reading of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* influenced his own position. It should be noted, however, that there has been no explicit attempt to prove this connection and all the scholarly discussion has focused exclusively on the question I am addressing in this paper; namely, whether or not Unamuno was defending a pragmatic argument for religious belief akin to that defended by James in his lecture "The Will to Believe".

In contrast with his lecture "The Will to Believe", which as I said before was explicitly formulated as a philosophical defense of religious belief, James conceived *The Varieties of Religious Experience* as a psychological descriptive inquiry constructed from a scientific, naturalistic perspective aimed at identifying the common psychological traits among personal testimonies of religious experience. Despite its psychological orientation, the book nonetheless has some interesting philosophical implications. In its last few pages, James states what he takes to be the main philosophical implication of his psychological study, which is an argument for *believing*, not as a doubtless established conclusion but as a corrigible hypothesis, the reality of a supernatural order — and by "hypothesis" James means "[...] something that may fit the facts so easily that your scientific logic will find no plausible pretext for vetoing your impulse to welcome it as true" [James (1902/2002), p. 394]. He states this argument as follows:

> Yet the unseen region in question is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world. When we commune with it, work it actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change. But that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself, so I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal. [...] The only thing that it [religious experience] unequivocally testifies to is that we can experience union with *something* larger than ourselves, and in that union find our greatest peace. [...] [T]he practical needs and experiences of religion seem to me sufficiently met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals. All that the facts require is that the power should be both other and larger than our conscious selves. Anything large will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite, it need not be solitary. It might conceivably even be only a larger and a more god-like self, of which the present self would then be but the mutilated expression, and the universe might conceivably be a collection of such selves, of different degrees of inclusiveness, with no absolute unity realized in it at all. Thus would a sort of polytheism return upon us —a polytheism which I do not on this occasion defend, for my only aim at present is to keep the testimony of religious experience clearly within its proper bounds. [James (1902/2002), pp. 398-405; emphasis of the author.]

James is arguing, then, that the well-attested testimony of religious experiences shows that it is possible to experience – *i.e.*, to have *an intimate feeling of* – a connection with "something larger than ourselves". In

turn, these experiences have relevant practical effects on those to whom they occur – *i.e.*, a change in the orientation of their acting – which are empirically verifiable for everybody, even for those who have not had these sorts of experiences. And despite not giving verifiable evidence that the alleged connection is a genuine connection with an external entity, James claims that these experiences make it reasonable, in so far as they may be explained by it, the hypothesis that there is in fact something larger than ourselves, different from ourselves — something that may be the cause of these experiences by entering into some sort of relation with us. And this "something", James adds, should not necessarily be identified with the traditional theistic conception of God. Leaving aside the interest that this argument may have in itself, the point I want to stress here given the purpose of my paper is that this argument, which James himself took as the most significant philosophical contribution of his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, has clearly nothing to do with either Unamuno's notion of religious faith nor his reasoning in defense of it.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have argued that Unamuno's notion of religious faith as "*querer creer*" cannot be identified with William James's "the will to believe". Like James, Unamuno aimed to offer a nonevidential justification for religious faith, but whereas James attempted to do so by appealing to a pragmatic reasoning, Unamuno aimed to offer a natural foundation for religious faith by appealing to the (according to Unamuno, natural and universal among all singular things) seeking of an endless existence.

Leaving aside other merits and deficiencies that Unamuno's reasoning may have, one of Unamuno's merits that makes his work still philosophically relevant today is his ability to construe a defence of religious faith by appealing to our not wanting to die, without having to assume the truth that God actually exists and that He will bless us with an endless existence, and without relying on any sort of pragmatic wager.

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NOTES

[1] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "El amor espiritual a sí mismo, la compasión que uno cobra para consigo, podrá acaso llamarse egotismo; pero es lo más opuesto que hay al egoísmo vulgar. Porque de este amor o compasión a ti mismo, de esta intensa desesperación, porque así como antes de nacer no fuiste, así tampoco después de morir serás, pasas a compadecer, esto es, a amar a todos tus semejantes y hermanos en aparencialidad, miserables sombras que desfilan de su nada a su nada, chispas de conciencia que brillan un momento en las infinitas y eternas tinieblas. Y de los demás hombres, tus semejantes, pasando por los que más semejantes te son, por tus convivientes, vas a compadecer a todos los que viven, y hasta a lo que acaso no vive, pero existe. Aquella lejana estrella que brilla allí arriba durante la noche, se apagará algún día y se hará polvo, y dejará de brillar y de existir. Y como ella, el cielo todo estrellado. ¡Pobre cielo! [...] Si llego a compadecer y amar a la pobre estrella que desaparecerá del cielo un día, es porque el amor, la compasión, me hace sentir en ella una conciencia, más o menos oscura, que la hace sufrir por no ser más que estrella, y por tener que dejarlo de ser un día. Pues toda conciencia lo es de muerte y de dolor. [...] Y cuando el amor es tan grande y tan vivo, y tan fuerte y desbordante que lo ama todo, entonces lo personaliza todo y descubre que el total Todo, que el universo es Persona también que tiene una Conciencia, Conciencia que a su vez sufre, compadece y ama, es decir, es conciencia. Y a esta Conciencia del Universo, que el amor descubre personalizando cuanto ama, es a lo que llamamos Dios" [Unamuno (1913b), pp. 191-192].

[2] When reading Unamuno it is important to bear in mind that he often uses "*creer*" ("believe") in a non-cognitive way as referring to his conception of religious faith and not to the acceptance, as a truth, of the factual claim that God exists. The following two quotes are an example of Unamuno's non-cognitivist usage of "*creer*" ("believe").

[3] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "Y sigo creyendo que si creyésemos todos en nuestra salvación de la nada, seríamos todos mejores" [Unamuno (1913b), p. 135].

[4] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "[...] hay que creer en esa otra vida para poder vivir ésta y soportarla y darle sentido y finalidad" [Unamuno (1913b), p. 261].

[5] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "¿Quienes se salvan? Ahora otra imaginación –ni más ni menos racional que cuantas van interrogativamente expuestas–, y es que sólo se salven los que anhelaron salvarse, que sólo se eternicen los que vivieron aquejados de terrible hambre de eternidad y de eternización. El que anhela no morir nunca, y cree no haberse nunca de morir en espíritu, es porque lo merece, o más bien, sólo anhela la eternidad personal el que la lleva ya dentro. No deja de anhelar con pasión su propia inmortalidad, y con pasión avasalladora de toda razón, sino aquel que no la merece, y porque no

la merece no la anhela. Y no es injusticia no darle lo que no sabe desear, porque pedid y se os dará. Acaso se le dé a cada uno lo que deseó. Y acaso el pecado aquel contra el Espíritu Santo para el que no hay, según el Evangelio, remisión, no sea otro que no desear a Dios, no anhelar eternizarse. [...] ¿Qué crueldad hay en negar a uno lo que no deseó o no pudo desear?" [Unamuno (1913b), pp. 255-256]. Notice that Kerrigan translates "El que anhela no morirse nunca, y cree *no haberse nunca* de morir en espíritu [...]" as "Whoever longs never to die and who believes he *will never* die in spirit [...]"; a more accurate translation of this sentence would be: "Whoever longs never to die and who believes *he should never* die in spirit [...]".

[6] In his "Verdad y vida", Unamuno says that: "[...] the modern pragmatists, headed by William James, judge a scientific truth or principle by their practical consequences. And when there is one who believes there are inhabitants on Saturn they ask him which of the things he does now he would not do, or which of the things he does not do that he would do if he did not believe there were inhabitants on this planet, or how he would change his behaviour if he changed his opinion about this. And if he replies that he would change nothing, they answer back that this is neither to believe anything at all, nor anything that resembles it. But this criterion applied in this way – and I must confess that the supreme masters of the school do not take it like this, so sullenly – is unacceptably narrow. The cult of truth for truth itself is one of the exercises that best lifts and fortifies the spirit." My own translation, the original Spanish text reads as follows: "[…] los pragmatistas modernos, a cuya cabeza va Guillermo James, juzgan de una verdad o principio científico, según sus consecuencias prácticas. Y así a uno que dice creer haya habitantes en Saturno le preguntan cuál de las cosas que ahora hace no haría o cuál de las que no hace haría en caso de no creer que haya habitantes en tal planeta, o en qué se modificaría su conducta si cambiase de opinión a tal respecto. Y si contesta que en nada, le replican que ni eso es creer cosa alguna ni nada que se le parezca. Pero este criterio así tomado –y debo confesar que no lo toman así, tan hoscamente, los sumos de la escuela– es de una estrechez inaceptable. El culto a la verdad por la verdad misma es uno de los ejercicios que más eleva el espíritu y lo fortifica" [Unamuno (1908), p. 265].

[7] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "Un día, hablando con un campesino, le propuse la hipótesis de que hubiese, en efecto, un Dios que rige cielo y tierra, Conciencia del Universo, pero que no por eso sea el alma de cada hombre inmortal en el sentido tradicional y concreto. Y me respondió: 'Entonces, ¿para qué Dios?' Y así se respondían en el recóndito foro de su conciencia el hombre Kant y el hombre James. Sólo que al actuar como profesores tenían que justificar racionalmente esa actitud tan poco racional. Lo que no quiere decir, claro está, que sea absurda" [Unamuno (1913b), p. 111].

[8] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "Mucho han disputado y mucho seguirán todavía disputando los hombres, ya que a sus disputas fue entregado el mundo, sobre el origen del conocimiento; mas dejando ahora para más adelante lo que de ello sea en las hondas entrañas de la existencia, es lo averi-

guado y cierto que en el orden aparencial de las cosas, en la vida de los seres dotados de algún conocer o percibir, más o menos brumoso, o que por sus actos parecen estar dotados de él, el conocimiento se nos muestra ligado a la necesidad de vivir y de procurarse sustento para lograrlo. Es una secuela de aquella esencia misma del ser, que, según Spinoza, consiste en el conato por perseverar indefinidamente en su ser mismo. Con términos en que la concreción raya acaso en grosería, cabe decir que el cerebro, en cuanto a su función, depende del estómago. [...] Tal es el origen que podemos llamar histórico del conocimiento, sea cual fuere su origen en otro respecto. Los seres que parecen dotados de percepción, perciben para poder vivir, y sólo en cuanto para vivir lo necesitan, perciben. [...] [E]l hecho primordial es que la curiosidad brotó de la necesidad de conocer para vivir, y éste es el peso muerto y la grosera materia que en su seno la ciencia lleva; y es que aspirando a ser un conocer por conocer, un conocer la verdad por la verdad misma, las necesidades de la vida fuerzan y tuercen a la ciencia a que se ponga al servicio de ellas, y los hombres, mientras creen que buscan la verdad por ella misma, buscan de hecho la vida en la verdad. Las variaciones de la ciencia dependen de las variaciones de las necesidades humanas, y los hombres de ciencia suelen trabajar, queriéndolo o sin quererlo, a sabiendas o no, al servicio de los poderosos o al del pueblo que les pide confirmación de sus anhelos. [...] El conocimiento está al servicio de la necesidad de vivir, y primariamente al servicio del instinto de conservación personal. Y esta necesidad y este instinto han creado en el hombre los órganos del conocimiento, dándoles el alcance que tienen. El hombre ve, oye, toca, gusta y huele lo que necesita ver, oír, tocar, gustar y oler para conservar su vida" [Unamuno (1913b), pp. 122-123].

[9] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "Porque decir que el mundo es como es y no de otro modo porque Dios así lo hizo, mientras no sepamos por qué razón lo hizo así, no es decir nada. Y si sabemos la razón de haberlo así hecho Dios, éste sobra, y la razón basta" [Unamuno (1913b), p. 205].

[10] The original Spanish text reads as follows: "[…] a quien se anhela y se reza de verdad" [Unamuno (1913b), p. 214].

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